DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 237 272 RC 014 436

AUTHOR	Loomis, Ralph A.; Spencer, Gregory P.
TITLE	Catalyst for Interorganizational Collaboration: The Partnership for Rural Improvement. Working Paper Series.
INSTITUTION	Partnership for Rural Improvement, Pullman, Wash.
PUB DATE	Dec 80
NOTE	38p.; For related documents, see ED 142 358, ED 162 787, ED 209 036, ED 214 729, ED 219 197, ED 235 983-985, RC 014 432-434, and RC 014 437.
PUB TYPE	Viewpoints (120)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Agency Cooperation; *Community Services; Cooperative Planning; *Coordination; *Delivery Systems; *Organizational Development; Organizations (Groups); *Rural Development; Workshops
IDENTIFIERS	Organizational Needs; *Partnership for Rural Improvement

ABSTRACT

The Partnership for Rural Improvement (PRI) designs and tests methods of creating and strengthening cooperation among providers and between providers and users of rural public services. PRI has defined six types of collaboration (voluntary, involuntary, formal, informal, direct, and indirect) and strives for voluntary collaboration among agencies, with a balance between formal and informal collaboration. Collaboration occurs in varying degrees ranging from simple awareness of another organization's existence (cooperation) through planned participation on projects (collaboration) to a planned overlapping of boards and a joint setting of policy (integration). Both among and within organizations, horizontal and vertical collaboration are necessary. Ideal collaboration involves perfect communication and understanding of expectations and implementation among all relevant persons at all working levels of all involved organizations. Still, certain conditions must be present for a voluntary collaborative arrangement to succeed. The conditions include personal commitment of involved individuals, obvious benefits to involved organizations, organizational support for individuals, and effective communication. Feeling that collaborative relationships develop hierarchically, PRI attempts to further collaborate by teaching workshops to meet organizational needs at four progressively complex levels: intrapersonal, interpersonal, intraorganizational, and interorganizational. PRI itself illustrates how to use this conceptual framework in implementing an active collaborative program. (SB)

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CATALYST FOR INTERORGANIZATIONAL COLLABORATION: THE PARTNERSHIP FOR RURAL IMPROVEMENT

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by

Ralph A. Loomis, Project Leader
Title V, RDA 1972

and

Gregory P. Spencer
Research Extension Program Assistant
Washington State University
Pullman, Washington

December 1980

RC014436

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CATALYST FOR INTERORGANIZATIONAL COLLABORATION: THE PARTNERSHIP FOR RURAL IMPROVEMENT

by

Ralph A. Loomis and Gregory P. Spencer*

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to examine interorganizational collaboration within the context of the Partnership for Rural Improvement (PRI). An underlying premise of the initial conceptualization of PRI is that public organizations and agencies with mandates to provide public services to rural areas can enhance the effectiveness of their delivery systems through collaboration. In part, this stems from the fact that change in rural areas is multifaceted, whereas organizations are functionally specialized. One component of PRI is, then, to design and test means of creating and strengthening cooperation among providers and between providers and users of public services--toward the end of making rural areas more desirable places in which to work and live.

First, a brief historical sketch of organizational change in our society is presented. This provides a broad perspective within which to view the importance of interorganizational relationships, particularly as they relate to rural change. Second, several sets of constructs are discussed to provide a conceptual base relevant to collaboration. This is followed by a section on collaboration from the perspective of the Partnership for Rural Improvement. And finally, some concluding observations are drawn concerning challenges to further develop potentials inherent in a collaborative mode of interaction.

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*Rural Development Project Leader, Title V, RDA 1972; and Research Extension Program Assistant, respectively.

The Setting: An Historical Sketch of Organizational Change

Cooperation (coordination) is joint or collaborative behavior that is directed toward some goal in which there is common interest or hope of reward (Nisbet, 1968). From this definition it is readily apparent that cooperative efforts in some form have existed throughout the history of mankind. Even recognition of discontinuity between conflict and cooperative theories of society does not preclude the reality of cooperation. As Nisbet points out, contemporary interest in the ethic and nature of cooperation can be seen as a reaction against tendencies of the age to explain social interaction with single-minded conflict theories; for example, classical economic theory (impersonal competition, self-interested individuals), and social Darwinism (with progress stemming only from competition and struggle). Suffice to recognize here that the topic at hand is not new, though the backdrop and configuration of the actors are contemporary.

The so-called "age of science" and the resultant "industrial revolution" is broadly recognized as a major threshold in the affairs of mankind. The attendant specialization of knowledge and function and the process of industrialization have been inseparably associated with changes in social organization. These changes have included proliferation and fragmentation of organizations and agencies to provide an expanding array of both public and private goods and services. This increased complexity and interdependence of organizations underlies the growing visibility of interorganizational relations on the agenda of the sciences concerned with social systems.

During the past several decades in the United States there have been a number of forces (in addition to increasing complexity) which have provided stimuli for interorganizational coordination. Among these have been economic, social, and political pressures to improve organizational efficiency, to expand the size of organization, to improve services to clientele, to expand the range of services provided, and to improve the effective use of increasingly scarce resources. These forces have impacted both private and public organizations, though the latter provides the primary orientation for this paper.

The changing role of the federal government relative to public service delivery is central to the increasing relevance of interorganizational relationships. Whether one elects to start the wave of an increased role of federal government in our affairs with the 1930s, or to start with the 1960s, there is no doubt of a dramatic change in how we do business today relative to yesteryear (Sundquist, 1969). Prior to the 1930s our system was referred to by some as "dual federalism," and by others as "corporate federalism." At any rate, the federal and state governments were essentially separate sovereignties, with independent spheres of activity. During the economic depression decade of the 1930s, responsibilities between federal and state governments became more shared, rather than divided. In the 1940s and 1950s, with the advent of federal grant-in-aid programs, federal assistance was instituted to assist state and local governments in accomplishing <u>their</u> objectives. Perhaps the period of greatest federal program proliferation was the 1960s, when federal assistance was instituted to accomplish <u>national</u> objectives.

It was during the 1960s that we witnessed creation of a host of federal programs which impacted rural development. Among them were: Office of Rural Area Development (ORAD, 1961), which had been preceded by the Rural Development Program (RD, 1955), and was superseded by the Rural Community Development Service (RCDS, 1965) which was "absorbed" by the Farmers Home Administration (FmHA, 1978); the Area Redevelopment Administration (ARA, 1961), predecessor to the Community Services Administration (CSA, 1974); Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D, 1962); Manpower Development and Training Act (MDTA, 1961), predecessor to Comprehensive Education and Training Act (CETA, 1973); and so on.

With this proliferation of rural development related federal programs, the need for coordination at federal, state, and local levels came into its own. Coordination, itself, became a national problem. Thus, dozens of coordinating structures emerged from as many agencies: Rural Area Development Committees (RADs, USDA, 1955), which were superseded by Technical Action Panels (TAPs, 1961) and by Rural Development Committees (RDCs, 1969); the Cooperative Area Manpower Planning System (CAMPS, USDL); Community Action Agencies (CAA, OEO); Overall Economic Development Program (OEDP, USDA); City Demonstration Agency (CDA, HUD); to mention only a few. Similarly, state and local governments, either at their own initiative or in compliance with federal legislation required to receive federal monies, created another layer of coordinative organizations.

At best, the success pattern of these government directed coordinative efforts is a mixed pattern. Some of the reasons for this will become more apparent in subsequent paragraphs as we discuss conditions which are conducive to interorganizational collaboration.

The essence of interorganizational collaboration, as relevant to programs designed to impact the process of rural development, is then that of redressing interdependencies among the increasing numbers of specialized organizations. This is little more than recognition of the fact that no single organization possesses all the necessary resources, knowledge, and skills to address all the dimensions of rural change. The users of services, more commonly than not, require inputs provided by two or more organizations to accomplish a single task. Development problems are usually multifaceted, due in large part to the interrelatedness of change. Furthermore, they are frequently viewed in general terms such as inadequacy of services or employment opportunities. Provider organizations, on the other hand, are normally limited to supplying only a specific service or input; for example, financial assistance or a technical engineering skill. Problem resolution, then, is dependent upon a mechanism for coordinating the specialized inputs of specialized service providers.

It is within this complex mosaic of rural development organizations and programs that the Partnership for Rural Improvement came into being. One of its premises is anchored in the hypothesis that if interorganizational collaboration could be enhanced, it would result in more effective service delivery on the part of public organizations having a mandate to assist in the rural development process.

Constructs of Collaboration

The phenomenon of collaboration has philosophical roots similar in nature to such concepts as cooperation, synthesis, interdependence, and cohesion. Collaborative behavior--for example, joint effort

directed toward common interests--is appropriate to the domain of any ideological or socioeconomic system, though it is not a neutral phenomenon in a value context, as illustrated in subsequent paragraphs. There are legitimate differences in philosophical perspective in viewing collaborative behavior. On the one hand, it may be viewed in a "means-end" context, in which collaboration is a management tool directed toward increased efficiency in a highly centralized political/industrial system. On the other hand, it may be viewed in a "meaning-worth" context, in which collaboration is a process directed toward enhancing social cohesion, a sense of community, a higher degree of interaction among persons in a pluralistic and secular society. In any event, there are sets of constructs which are useful to the understanding and practice of collaboration. In practice these constructs are seldom, if ever, found in their "pure" abstract form. Rather, they are manifest as a continuum, with any number of variations and degrees of relativity observable in practice. These constructs overlap and impact each other in often complex ways. Collaborative phenomena can seldom be expressed in universal terms, rather under certain conditions, situations, and organizational parameters.

The constructs identified in this paper include:

- Types of Collaboration
- Degrees of Collaborative Interaction
- Working Levels of Collaboration
- Necessary Conditions for Voluntary Collaboration
- Collaboration: An Interorganizational Hierarchy of Needs

Types of Collaboration

In this section six different "types" of collaboration are identified. They are not intended to be exhaustive.

Voluntary and Involuntary: In the instance of voluntary collaboration, two or more individuals or organizational representatives decide it is in their interest, and/or the interest of their clientele, to work together in the provision of services. A multitude of possible motivational factors exist which may explain this voluntary decision; for example, their services may be highly complementary to users, the services may be highly interdependent to users, organizational efficiency may be enhanced through collaboration, and so on (Mulford and Klonglan, 1979).

Collaborative participation in PRI is entirely voluntary for organizations, and largely, if not completely so, for individuals within those organizations. Searching for and creating conditions which are conducive to both organizational and individual voluntary participation in PRI activities is, indeed, central to the partnership concept.

Involuntary collaboration may be typified by the issuance of a mandate by high-level policy decision makers that subordinate organizations and/or individuals will collaborate. The intensity, quality, and viability of involuntary collaboration is dependent upon a myriad of interacting variables at the level of implementation. These would include variables such as trust level, willingness, communication networks, resource support, and reward systems. However, there is considerable evidence that highly effective involuntary collaboration is unlikely.

Formal and Informal: The criteria for classifying a collaborative arrangement as formal or informal are basically legalistic in nature. For example, the fire departments in two nearby rural towns may have a written contractural agreement to jointly construct, maintain, and utilize a common training facility. This would exemplify a formal collaborative agreement between two organizations. The same two fire departments may simply have a mutual understanding that in case of an emergency need they will come to each others aid. Or perhaps through tradition they will jointly sponsor an annual fireman's ball in a common facility. Such relationships are informal in nature.

The significance of this formal to informal relationship gradient to PRI comes to focus in the context of flexibility. Given the developmental nature of PRI, there are tradeoffs between casting expectations through formal agreements and maximizing flexibility of expectations through informal relationships. On the one hand, formal commitments between some of the partners are essential to resource commitment on the part of those organizations and to build toward institutionalization (which is in essence a formal arrangement) of relationships. On the other hand, the formalization of agreements between and among partners can be restrictive to adaptation to change. A characteristic of organizational maturity, and the ultimate demise of an organization, is that it becomes so formalized as to prohibit adaptation to change. Thus, an element of the search going on within PRI is to seek a balance between formal and informal organizational relationships which will optimize the potential gains of collaboration, yet provide a mechanism for adaption to change in those relationships.

Direct and Indirect: A third type of collaboration relates to the directness or indirectness of the relationship. This dimension may at first appear simplistic, but with further investigation becomes more difficult. A direct collaborative relationship could be characterized by two or more organizations planning joint participation on projects by members of several levels within the organizations. Similar to the formal arrangement described in the previous section, direct relationships imply open agreements between organizations.

Indirect collaborative relationships involve, for example, an organizational representative sitting in on a board or council. An illustration is the President's Executive Cabinet comprised of the secretaries of the various departments: State, Defense, Education, Agriculture, etc. These departments do operate collaboratively with each other in certain projects and programs, but their organizational link is primarily through the cabinet.

Degrees of Collaborative Interaction

Cooperative working arrangements between organizations exhibit a broad range of levels or degrees of interaction. Recognizing that classification of phenomenon along a continuum is ordinal in nature, the following list of nine degrees of collaboration serves to illustrate this concept. The degrees of collaborative interaction are arranged from "low" (number one) to "high" (number nine). Typically, high degrees of collaboration do not occur in the absence of lower collaborative interaction. For example, it is not likely that organizations will exchange personnel and resources (degree six) prior to having a clear understanding of each others policies or program information (degree five).

Degrees of Collaborative Interaction[1]

1. Awareness of the existence of other organizations.
2. Acquaintance with programs and activities of organizations.
3. Informal communication among personnel.
4. Limited exchange of program information.
5. Planned provisions for sharing of information.
6. Exchange of personnel, resources, and materials.
7. Planned participation on projects.
8. Joint development of budgets/use of resources.
9. Planned, overlapping boards, joint setting of policies.

It is important to recognize that one degree of collaborative interaction is not, per se, "better" or "worse" than another. Rather, appropriateness is a function of the shared objectives of the organizations and individuals involved. However, it may well be that the objectives of the collaborating organizations would be judged wanting by criteria of public service users--that is, a "higher" degree of collaborative interaction may result in more effective service delivery. At any rate, each collaborative arrangement is situational specific, and as experience is gained the barriers to working together are likely to lessen. If the situation then calls for higher degrees of collaborative interaction, modifications become feasible.

As a result of discussing these nine degrees of collaborative interaction in workshops and seminars, it has proven helpful to some to classify them in a slightly different fashion (though there is a risk of introducing confusion of semantics). At any rate, one may

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[1]This listing is synthesized from a number of writings on interorganizational collaboration.

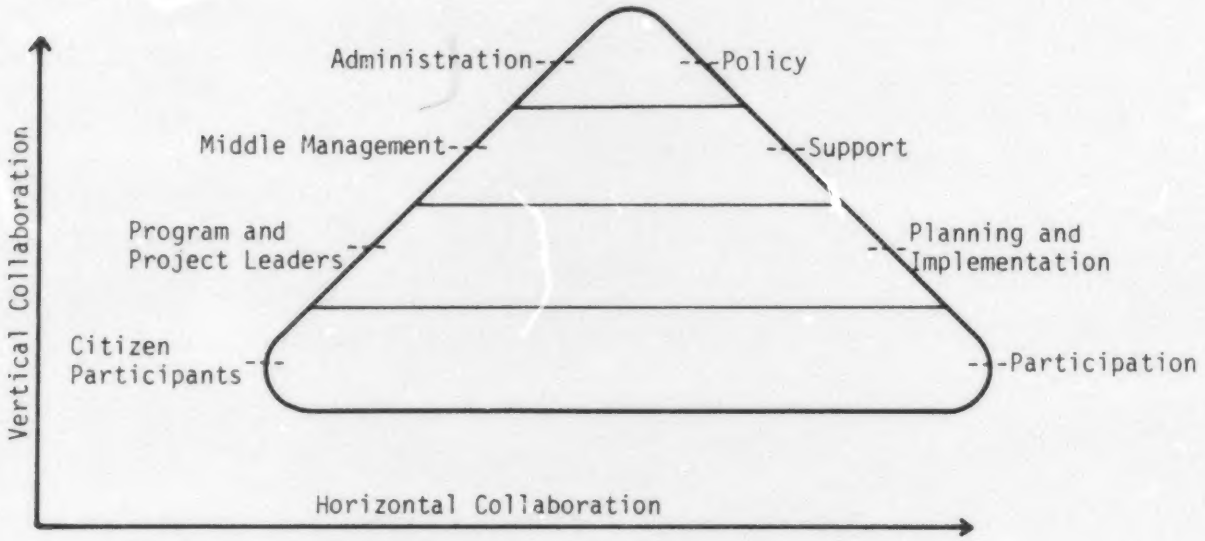
wish to think of degrees one through five as cooperation or coordination, degrees six and seven as collaboration, and degrees eight and nine as integration. Others have found it helpful to think of the nine degrees of organizational interaction as variation in intensity.

Working Levels of Collaboration

A discussion of the construct we have labeled as "working levels of collaboration" is best pursued by first differentiating between vertical and horizontal collaboration. Most societal organizations are hierarchially structured. Furthermore, these organizations are characterized by "layers" of functional specialization, which for purposes of this paper we refer to as "working levels" (see Figure 1). By vertical collaboration we refer to interaction between people of different working levels. This is most common, of course, within single organizations. Horizontal collaboration, on the other hand, is most common interorganizationally, with interaction between people at the same or similar working levels of the hierarchy. This does not preclude the common practice of horizontal collaboration within a single organization, but the primary focus of this paper is on working relationships between organizations.

If an ideal interorganizational collaborative relationship could be described (a task impeded by the significance of situational specific conditions), it would be one in which there was perfect communication and understanding of expectations and implementation among all relevant persons at all working levels. This would be the case regardless of the level of collaborative interaction--discussed in the preceding paragraphs.

Figure 1. Working Levels of Collaboration



The above emphasis on relevant persons enables recognition of the fact that there are many situations in which effective interorganizational collaboration can and does occur between individuals at given working levels; for example, between administrators, between citizen participants, etc., which does not necessitate involvement at all working levels. However, a common constraint to effective interorganizational collaboration is the absence, for whatever reason, of adequate communication and understanding among relevant persons in either or both the vertical or horizontal network.

Necessary Conditions for Voluntary Collaboration

In one sense, to identify all the conditions necessary for voluntary collaborative relationships is the counterpart of the constraints to collaboration. However, in our experiences, in PRI, with a role of

functioning as a catalyst for interorganization collaboration, we have found that focusing on necessary conditions for collaboration, rather than constraints, leads to a more positive progression toward building a cooperative climate. Focusing on constraints has a tendency to reinforce a defensive attitude. Though this may be a subtle distinction, subtleties, or even dwelling on the seemingly obvious, may make the difference between building constructive relationships and reinforcing existing barriers.

There are many instances in which collaboration between organizations occurs "naturally." There may be interdependencies whereby the very existence of organizations dictates that they work together; for example, commercial airlines and publicly owned and operated airport facilities, or publicly owned electricity generating plants and privately owned electricity distribution systems.

While there are, then, cooperative relationships among organizations which stem from situational settings, these are not of primary concern to PRI, for they are perpetuated largely through obvious necessity. But benefical collaborative arrangements can also occur through a rational, anticipatory, or planned process. Through a systematic analysis (a means-end schema) organizations may "discover" collaborative arrangements which would be beneficial to all concerned. It is this latter collaborative challenge to which we particularly address the necessary conditions for collaboration, for it is a relationship which must be developed and nutured.

In a most elementary sense, organizations have a compound structure: namely, they are comprised of people and an organizational identity *per se*. There are necessary conditions for collaboration which pertain

to each of these components, though the distinction is sometimes very fluid, since the people and the organization are so closely intertwined. The distinction may be useful, however, in a day-to-day operational context or in the setting of developing collaborative relationships.

Personal Commitment: Probably first and foremost as a necessary condition is a personal commitment of the involved individuals that a collaborative mode to accomplish a goal is worthy of consideration. This is largely a value orientation. In fact, to some, goal accomplishment through cooperation (in contrast to a competitive mode) is to be preferred because they place a greater relative value on the means of accomplishment (as compared with ends)--particularly in the long-run. Or, an individual may place a relatively high value on cooperation in the accomplishment of a given short-run task because they visualize this approach as contributing to a long-range goal of developing a sense of community with attributes they highly value.

In any event, interorganizational collaboration is highly unlikely to occur unless the involved or potentially involved individuals have a personal commitment to such enterprise. This is particularly true in instances of voluntary types of collaborative arrangements.

Contribute to Organizational Goals: Obviously, collaboration is not a panacea. There are many organizations with a mission so functionally or geographically specific that their goal can be effectively accomplished without collaborating with others. Similarly, many specific functions of complex organizations can also be most effectively accomplished without horizontal collaboration. It follows, then, that a necessary condition for voluntary collaboration is that

it contribute to accomplishment of the goals of the organizations involved. There must be a comparative advantage to working cooperatively.

While this necessary condition, as stated, appears to be absolute, there are at least two caveats. First is the need to consider both short- and long-run goals as they may pertain to cooperation with others. A nonproductive investment in collaboration when viewed in the short-run may well be a productive long-run investment in terms of organizational goals. Secondly, organizational goals may well include some intangible considerations which necessitate a large element of judgmental decision making. For example, the willingness of a given public-supported organization to cooperate with others may be the price of continued financial support to continue as an organization in the long-run.

Organizational Support: At least two types of organizational support are essential to interorganizational collaboration; namely, personal rewards and materials support. It is gradually being recognized that initiating and facilitating interorganizational collaboration involves elements of organizational hierarchial "working levels" (see Figure 1) commonly classified as administration, middle management, and program management. Within the context of PRI, and particularly the partners representing institutions of higher learning, collaborative implementation is also being gradually recognized as performance of a public service. Furthermore, there is increased awareness that collaborative enterprise invariably necessitates organizational change within the involved organizations. Thus, interorganizational cooperation is not an isolated function. This in turn leads to normal resistance patterns to change within organizations.

Against this background, individuals involved in acting as catalysts for building working relationships between and among organizational entities are inevitably exposed to considerable professional and personal risk. It is essential, therefore, that they have a base of support within their organization which can reward them for this nontraditional public-service activity.

The very nature of the tasks involved in creating and maintaining voluntary cooperation among organizations are seemingly very time-consuming. It is obvious that financial resources are essential to successfully implement this function. Highly skilled personnel, with employment continuity, are indispensable. Similarly, traditional resource support must be allocated to develop and sustain this collaborative public-service function. These are minimal necessary conditions for voluntary interorganizational activities.

Effective Communication: Even within organizations, effective communication is a perpetual problem. Both the need for and the difficulty of communication is increased manyfold in an interorganizational collaborative setting. This is particularly true in a multiorganizational endeavor such as PRI. There is enhanced importance for effective communication both within and between the partners.

Communication has many dimensions such as quality, frequency, clarity, and comprehension. All of these dimensions are implied in siting effective communication as a necessary condition for voluntary collaboration. Either the failure to communicate or misunderstanding resulting from unclear communication is a fundamental barrier to successful collaboration.

A major building block of collaboration is effective communication. Much of the effort of individuals involved in collaborative activities is devoted to communication. A typical day involves numerous decisions and follow up about what is relevant and necessary to communicate, to whom, via which media, and so forth. It is the importance of the communication component of collaboration which has considerable influence on the formalization of collaborative relationships. Formal arrangements tend to standardize and to telescope behavioral expectations thus reducing the number of variables to be handled by continuous communication. Formal arrangements may be as simple as predetermining meeting dates for every third Thursday of the month, or as complex as contractual agreements concerning finances and personnel.

At any rate, there is little doubt that effective communication is essential to successful voluntary collaboration.

Other Conditions: The necessary conditions for voluntary collaboration which are discussed in the preceding paragraphs are by no means all-inclusive, but we think they are among the most important conditions. Others that might be considered include: absence of legal constraints which inhibit, if not prohibit, collaboration with others (though some practitioners feel that any legal constraint can be circumvented if there is a willingness); there must be mutual recognition of the need or benefits of cooperation; collaboration must be appropriate to the situation; benefits from collaboration must be demonstrable and communicated to support units; and so forth.

Collaboration: An Interorganizational Hierarchy of Needs

This final set of constructs relating to interorganizational collaboration which we discuss in this paper is closely associated

with several of the preceding sets. However, in this section we interweave the constructs in a progressive fashion to illustrate an underlying operational pattern which has evolved in the unfolding of collaborative experiences in PRI.

Psychologist Abraham Maslow's theory of personality states that, although every individual is striving for self-actualization (fulfillment), it is difficult to reach the ideal self because of external factors that interfere with the striving (Maslow, 1968). The factors confront the individual at different stages during his/her life; they may at some point block the individual from progressing toward the fulfillment of higher level needs. For example, the person who is afraid to express their thoughts and feelings is denied the fulfillment of expressing themselves openly. They cannot progress to a more advanced stage of interpersonal relations until they are able to overcome this fear.

Maslow defined humanity's strivings in terms of a Hierarchy of Needs. The earliest needs are for physiological comfort. These are followed by safety needs: namely, a drive for security and organization. Satisfaction of these needs in turn leads to needs for belongingness and love, esteem, self-actualization, knowledge, and finally, an aesthetic need.

An individual's needs, then, are progressive--that is, needs further up the hierachy cannot be dealt with until the more basic and fundamental needs are satisfied. The same is true for interorganizational collaboration. The development of collaborative relationships between agencies, institutions, and organizations must begin at a most basic level; namely, the individual person within the organization. We call this the intrapersonal level. Everybody has needs for security, self-esteem, personal

recognition, pride, and so on. Until these most basic intrapersonal needs are satisfied, successful interaction with others is precluded. Unless the individual feels good about him or herself, the development of interorganizational relationships is difficult, if not impossible.

One of PRI's primary strategies for increasing interorganizational relationships is via the mechanism of workshops.[2] Each workshop is conducted by PRI training staff, with one or several agencies and/or organizations simultaneously represented. They vary widely in duration from one-half day to three or four days, and consist of several areas of focus, from communication skills to problem solving, to futuring. The workshops are designed to meet organizations needs at four progressively complex levels: (1) the needs of the individual vis-a-vis the organization; we call this the intrapersonal level, (2) the needs of individuals to successfully interact with each other; we call this the interpersonal level, (3) the need for organizations to develop and maintain good, positive internal structures; we call this the intraorganizational level, and finally, (4) the need for organizations to build linkages and solid, interdependent relationships with other organizations; we call this highest level, interorganizational. Figure 2 indicates the hierarchial nature of this model. Let us examine, then, the model PRI has developed relative to this "interorganizational hierarchy of needs."

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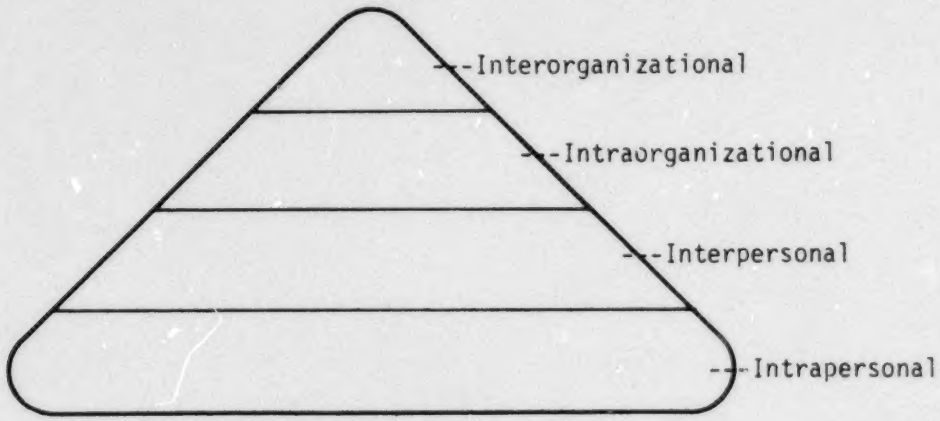
[2]While we focus on a workshop strategy here, the same principles are modeled and taught, as appropriate, by PRI staff in group interventions.

Figure 2. A Hierarchial Collaborative Process



Intrapersonal Level: The individual, it can be said, is the foundation on which the whole model is supported. Any organization can only be as successful, productive, or innovative as the individuals of which it is comprised. Unless individuals are willing to build linkages and cooperative relationships, no amount of administrative/organizational intervention will prove successful. The PRI model accounts for these individual needs as the training staff models certain positive behaviors and designs structured activities that encourage personal growth and development.

Perhaps the most significant behavior modeled by PRI trainers is self-worth. Virginia Satir, the noted family therapist, points out:

> I am convinced that the crucial factor in what happens both inside people and between people is the picture of individual worth that each person carries around with him. Integrity, honesty, responsibility, compassion--all flow easily from the person whose self-worth is high. He feels that he matters, that the world is a better place because he is here. He has faith in his own competence. He is able to ask others for help, but believes he can make his own decisions and is his own

> best resource. Appreciating his own worth, he is ready to see and respect the worth of others. He radiates trust and hope. He doesn't have rules against anything he feels. He accepts all of himself as human (Satir, 1972, pp. 21-22).

It is with individual self-worth that the trainers begin. As PRI trainers model behaviors, some workshop participants vicariously, if not directly, assume different self-pictures. Trainers also attempt to be as supportive and encouraging as possible to participants. By receiving structured feedback, participants gain information about themselves which provides them with a "self-inventory" which generally increases their confidence and self-worth. Feedback is not always positive, but with a clearer picture of his or her strengths and weaknesses the participant has a more realistic picture of him or herself. "Knowledge is power" and self-knowledge is no exception.

The PRI trainers model positive behaviors continuously, and attempt to transfer skills via this mechanism. We have already mentioned self-worth, which could include confidence, security, integrity, etc. Other behaviors modeled by trainers are: risk taking, self-disclosure, sharing feelings.

The other mechanism for facilitating personal growth is through the use of structured activities. A structured activity is based on a "do-look-learn" model of skill and knowledge transference where participants take part in an experience, observe their own and others' behavior, and finally discuss and apply some general theory to the experience.

As we move up the hierarchy, and meet progressively more complex sets of needs, the individual continues being impacted intrapersonally. For example, when focusing on the area of conflict management, as the individual gains increased facility at utilizing interpersonal or

intergroup conflict in a positive way, that individual gains yet another "tool" and increases his or her sense of personal resourcefulness.

Interpersonal Level: As we move to the second level, that of interpersonal, we attempt to provide workshop participants with a storehouse of skills or tools, that can be employed to better all of their relationships, and most particularly, those within their organization and affiliated organizations. Communication skills is an area that is typically included in the workshop design. The four skills most widely used are: paraphrase, perception check, behavior description, and feeling statement. Communication is the largest single factor determining what kinds of relationships a person makes with others and what happens to him/her in their world.

Another area of focus at this second level is group development where participants gain an understanding of the various stages through which groups progress toward maturity. Wil Schutz has developed a model of group development that is used frequently by the PRI training staff. According to Schutz, individuals and groups want and express the three needs of inclusion, control, and affection to different degrees. His theory states that in the beginning of a group's development the areas of interaction focus on issues of inclusion, control, and affection and usually in that order although at any given time all three categories are present (Schutz, 1971).

Individual leadership within groups is often an issue of great importance for agencies and organizations. Partnership for Rural Improvement workshops attempt to help participants evaluate both the extent and style of their leadership within their organization. The two poles on the leadership continuum involve either a task-orientation

or person-orientation. The leader who attends to both the task at hand (e.g., developing a local zoning ordinance, and the needs of the individuals in the group) will achieve a higher degree of success and achievement.

Conflict management is an area gaining increasing awareness and familiarity among working groups. Conflict, itself, is a normal occurrence whenever any two individuals attempt working together, and signifies a healthy level of involvement. It is when the conflict becomes destructive or counterproductive that it is inappropriate. Numerous techniques for dealing with and positively utilizing conflict have been developed in the social science and management fields. Partnership for Rural Improvement trainers make significant use of these techniques and models in designing workshops for which conflict is an area of concern for participants and their organizations.

Intraorganizational Level: Before an organization can achieve solid collaborative relationships with other organizations, it needs "to have its own house in order." By examining issues such as goals and objectives, climate setting, group and intergroup problem solving, decision making, and feedback mechanisms, an orga ization can develop the readiness to establish coordinated networks with other organizations. The PRI design strategy for working with groups focuses on these issues.

Unless members of an organization agree on a shared goal, the organization will be fraught with problems of intergroup conflict and periods of mixed resurgence and decline. The one issue needing resolution before any significant group accomplishment can occur is the development of a broad, overarching mission or purpose statement around which members can organize and identify. Workshops typically include

techniques and structured activities which enable organizations to arrive at such commonly shared goals. Once established and clearly communicated to each member, the goal statement can be more easily followed with objectives or strategies for attaining the goal.

The kind of climate or atmosphere established in an organization is affected by behaviors of the individual members. Earlier in the workshop participants gained new behaviors: namely, communicating candidly and accurately, confronting and dealing with issues, utilizing each member's resourcefulness, etc. Once a positive climate is created, it is important that it be supported and nourished.

Interorganizational Level: Individuals and organizations working together toward common goals is the apex of the collaborative hierarchial model. While the learning experiences within the "lower" levels of the hierarchy possess intrinsic values, the primary focus is on stimulating and facilitating meaningful interorganizational efforts to improve the delivery and utilization of the public service dimension of the partners and participants involved in PRI.

It is through the learning process involving the aforementioned skills and perspectives (both personal and intraorganizational) that interorganizational collaboration becomes feasible. Willingness to cooperate is enhanced, appropriateness of collaboration can be assessed, and capabilities to work together are improved.

Through the use of workshops, organizational meetings, personal contacts, etc., not only are skills being taught, but the extremely important factor of building interpersonal and interorganizational trust is occurring. "Myth-slaying" through becoming acquainted, communication, etc. (those interpersonal skills), becomes an indispensable building block on the way to cooperation.

Similarly, the process of building linkages or networks among relevant individuals, organizations, and interrelated projects and programs is initiated through these opportunities to meet and learn together (Spencer, 1980).

A unique and singularly important characteristic of PRI that enables its staff members, particularly the community service consultants, to act as catalysts for interorganizational collaboration is an earned credibility in sponsoring and facilitating collaboration from a neutral base. This neutrality or nonadvocacy role is in the context of organizational neutrality; not to be confused with a nonadvocacy position relative to issues or causes (for PRI is an advocate of collaboration when appropriate).

Collaboration In Practice

In the preceding sections of this paper we have addressed some of the major conceptual constructs relevant to interorganizational collaboration. Focus has been on those constructs which are particularly relevant to PRI, rather than an attempt to be all-inclusive of the numerous conceptual foundations relevant to this topic which arise from nearly all social science disciplines.

The purpose of the next few paragraphs is to illustrate the nexus between the constructs of collaboration and implementation of an action program with collaboration as a central building block. As illustrative material we will utilize the experiences associated with initiating the Partnership for Rural Improvement. By way of setting, it may be helpful to first view the context within which PRI collaborative activities take place. The context includes complexities such as the following:

1. Organizational, and to a considerable degree personal, participation in PRI is voluntary.

2. Both short-term and long-term strategies of rural change are utilized.

3. There is involvement with a multiplicity of service delivery systems, each with distinct characteristics such as size, mission, clientele, and geographic coverage.

4. Intervention at different social system levels including persons, organizations, institutions, communities, and areas.

5. Emphasis on educational strategy, particularly with reference to the process of change in a problem-solving mode.

6. A highly diverse array of situational factors (value conflicts, political pressures, decision-making formats) which provides challenges for both macro and micro programming.

7. The "open-system" characteristic of PRI (i.e., striving to assure access to all interested parties) invites collaborative complexity.

Within this highly heterogenous setting, the experiences of PRI to date in creating and nuturing cooperative relationships among persons, agencies, and institutions have been varied. Successes and failures differ with respect to levels, dimensions, and types of cooperation. While the following paragraphs will capture some of these initial experiences, it is important to recognize that we are addressing a highly dynamic and continuous process. The long-term strength and effectiveness of cooperative relationships must await the test of time and the solidification of a social system dimension whose function is to facilitate these interorganizational ties.

Initiating the Partnership

From its inception, PRI has been rooted in a value system which seeks a sense of community through a cooperative orientation, in contrast

to a competitive, power-based dominance. During the formative months of the program at Washington State University, a small "working team" was formed to initiate the preliminary planning essential to launching a multiorganizational partnership. This ad hoc committee, as it came to be known, was comprised of seven social scientists of differing disciplines drawn from three colleges and several departments of the university. If the program was to even be initiated, the members of this small group either had to know, or to learn, how to work together as a team. Effective cooperation was accomplished through a process of value and perception sharing and establishing agreed upon objectives and procedures.

As the interpersonal skills of the ad hoc committee developed, a process of intraorganizational development (within WSU) was initiated. An advisory committee of middle-management administrators (primarily disciplinary department chairmen) was formed. Cooperation at this level of the system was essential to gaining staff support for the program. Simultaneously, an advisory council of college deans was organized, again to provide the necessary intraorganizational support within the university hierarchial structure. This process of intra-organizational coordination among key administrative units of the university, including the central administration, has continued as a PRI focus throughout the program. Motivation for this vital organizational development focus has been sustained by the increasing realization of the need for the university to expand its capacity to meet the needs of rural people.

Another dimension of interorganizational collaboration which comprises an essential building block of PRI is manifest in the idea

of a "partnership" among participating organizations. During the early stages of preparing the grant proposal, policy decision makers of other institutions of higher learning within the proposed demonstration area and of federal, state, and local government agencies and organizations were contacted concerning their interest in considering participation in a partnership. Responses were generally favorable, if guarded. Once funding was announced (though prior to actual receipt) the first major step toward forming a climate for interagency collaboration was to invite central- and middle-management decision makers from this host of organizations with rural development mandated responsibilities to a general meeting. The purpose of the meeting was, largely through information sharing, to invite and encourage their participation in this cooperative partnership. A process was also begun of building trust between the lead institution (Washington State University) and the invited partnership participants. Voluntary coordination among organizations could not even be initiated in the absence of at least a modicum of trust and a willingness to explore possibilities. Through sharing and discussion of ideas at this meeting, the necessary "blessing" from institutional and organizational leaders was obtained at this meeting. We might add that this process must, and does, continue through time, particularly with changes of personnel and the necessity of obtaining organizational resource commitment to sustain the work initiated largely by grant funds.

With the "license" now to create a working partnership, rural development program managers held a three-day retreat to shape the structure and operating procedures of a collaborative multiorganizational program. Again the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and interorganizational

dimensions of cooperation were of the essence. Trust building (personal and organizational), sharing of ideas and ideals, conflict resolution, compromise, and meeting of minds were all in action. Group decision-making skills and techniques of community development consultants were utilized to facilitate this team building process.

Numerous decisions were made at this organizational meeting which would set the tone and procedures of the partnership for the years ahead. A representative regionwide policy making body (Regional Coordinating Committee) was organized (carefully balanced so that WSU would not have a dominant role); consensus decision making was adopted; three subregions were formed; representative subregional management committees were created; the decision was made to employ professional community development consultants in each subregion; and so forth. While slight modifications have been made in the structure during the four years, the coordinative mechanism of the partners has remained essentially stable.

Regional Policy Level Collaboration

The Regional Coordinating Committee (RCC) has been reasonably effective in performing the functions of regionwide interorganizational collaboration. For the organizations represented, it has provided a mechanism for trust building, communication about their respective organizations and public service programs, policy guidance to the PRI staff, performance of certain administrative functions, and, in some instances, the performance of a liaison or linkage function between PRI and their individual parent organization.

The aforementioned "open-system" characteristic of PRI, in an effort to assure access to all interested parties, results in a

diversity of types of organizations represented on the RCC. It ranges from institutions of higher learning to federal, state, and local government agency representation. In terms of functional diversity, they are representatives of educational, federal, and state program managers, and elected local government officials. This diversity results in considerable variation in perspectives and implications of a collaborative enterprise. For example, for the five institutions of higher learning represented on the RCC it has provided a mechanism for joint sharing of personnel employment, facilities and materials sharing, and faculty exchange in teaching specific university or college credit courses. This represents a high level of interorganizational collaboration. This suggests that a higher level of collaboration among "like" institutions is more likely to occur, or is more feasible, than is the case between more functionally diverse organizations.

Another somewhat related diversity among RCC members is that they occupy very different position levels in their hierarchically structured parent organizations. The RCC representative may or may not be in a policy making position within his/her parent organization, or may have a policy making function for only a segment of the parent organization. Obviously, this has an influcence on the character of the RCC as an interorganizational collaborative body.

A further dimension of this complexity can be illustrated by simply calling attention to the differences between the extent of organizational representativeness for which specific RCC members speak. Some members can speak essentially only for themselves, not for all like units; for example, a county commissioner, a city major, a county or regional

planner. A federal or state government representative can, at best, speak only for a particular agency, or a subpart of an agency. On the other hand a representative from an instituion of higher learning may be able to speak for those elements of the institution which are relevant to the broad spectrum of the partnership outreach activities. Again, these complexities of interorganizational collaboration among diverse types of organizations have an influence on the character of collaboration.

Subregional Level Collaboration

The interoganizational collaboration mechanism of the three PRI subregions (which coincide with three community college district boundaries) is a subregional committee. There is some variation among the three subcommittees in composition of organizations represented, but to a considerable extent the composition mirrors that of the RCC.

The subregional committees (SRC) function independently from one another. They establish operational policies for their respective areas, perform certain administrative functions, participate with staff on decisions about which projects to undertake, and to some extent (it varies by subregions) participate directly as individual members in project implementation. Even though the parent organization position "levels" of these subcommittee members is extremely variable (administrators, program managers, unaffiliated citizens, etc.) they tend to function in a middle-management context as a committee.

The subregional committees operate in perhaps the most complex collaborative setting of PRI. This is in part because of the close association between the community development consultant and the SRC. Though the community development consultant is the key person (and

is programmatically responsible to the SRC) jointly they are responsible for needs assessment, resource linkage, and project implementation. The SRC is also the primary link between subregional activities, the RCC, and regionwide partnership support staff. Project collaboration among partners, and other participating organizations and individuals, is arranged through the SRC, with the community development consultant as the principal catalyst and linkage agent (Spencer, 1980).

Collaboration at the Point of Service Delivery

People from different organizations working together at the point of service delivery is the payoff of collaborative efforts at higher levels of organizational hierarchies. Interorganizational collaboration at the point of service delivery, within the context of the complex situational settings being addressed by PRI, happens when the necessary conditions (personal and organizational) are in place.[3] It is dependent upon intrapersonal, interpersonal, and intraorganizational development of values, skills, relationships, and structure for its fruition. It is a process which involves actors at all levels of the partnership participants, from administrators to citizen participants. To insure that this process will continue for strengthening the linkage between providers and users of public services necessitates an institutionalized mechanism within and between the partners.

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[3]We recognize, of course, that cooperation between individuals from different organizations can and commonly does take place at the point of service delivery in the absence of cooperation at higher levels of organization hierarchy. Important as this is, it is only peripherally relevant to the more complex and developmental nature of interorganizational collaboration being addressed in this paper.

Concluding Observations

The preceding paragraphs provide an interwoven sketch of a conceptual framework for collaboration and the evolvement of a collaborative process within the PRI experience. The fact that PRI is a linkage model for rural development (PRI, Annual Report 1978-79) and the highly complex context surrounding the undertaking dictate the importance of interorganizational collaboration to this program. This is not to suggest that collaboration, in and of itself, is a panacea to rural development. Rather, it is to suggest that organizations with mutual rural development responsibilities have an obligation to explore and test potentials for cooperation as a means of improving their service delivery effectiveness. A multitude of collaborative relationships have resulted from PRI activities. Though each of these relationships are situational specific, the constructs reviewed in this paper are elements of a foundation for building working relationships. It is important to reiterate that developing and maintaining cooperation between and among individuals and organizations is a dynamic process. It is also a learning process, whereby appropriate and effective linkages become strengthened with experience.

The challenge is to continue seeking ways to further develop the potentials of a collaborative mode of interaction. It is also essential to continue to observe, document, analyze, and explicate the often nebulous and subtle elements of building these working relationships that we may better understand and utilize this body of knowledge to accomplish desired goals.

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